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AUTHOR Plummer, Diane L.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The subject of grade retention has generated substantial theoretical, empirical, and practical attention for almost a century. However, few conclusive statements regarding this widespread practice can be made, and the literature has generated mixed results. Reviews of the literature prompt many questions: Does retaining a child in grade increase subsequent academic performance? What are children's perceptions of retained peers? Do retained children have expectations different from those of their nonretained counterparts about performance, school, and teachers? and, Is children's self-esteem affected by grade retention? The first section of this discussion summarizes available data about effects of grade retention on children's academic performance. The second section presents information about the social behaviors of children who have been retained, including information on how perceptions of others can influence children's school performance and interaction with peers. The third section summarizes data regarding effects of grade retention on children's self-esteem. The fourth section offers suggestions for future research, concluding that grade retention can be beneficial if certain conditions are met. Such conditions concern selection for retention, time of implementation, assessment of academic progress, and emotional support. (RH)

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THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF GRADE RETENTION: A CONVERGENT ANALYSIS

Diane L. Plummer

University of Georgia

Marilyn Hazzard Lineberger

Emory University

William G. Graziano

University of Georgia

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education

College of Education
University of Illinois
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave.
Urbana, IL 61801-4897
(217) 333-1386

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most influential institutions for the development of children is the elementary school. This influence extends beyond intellectual development into the general realm of social development (see Centra & Potter, 1980; Gump, 1980; Hetherington & Parke, 1979). In the Caswell and Foshay text Education in the Elementary School (1957), George Strayer presents an idealized view of the school: "The good elementary school is one in which children learn the tool of inquiry, respect for differences and open-minded avoidance of prejudice, the difficult relationship between freedom and responsibility, and the art of cooperating" (p. 6). According to Metcalfe (1981) the school is second only to the home as an institution that determines the growing individual's self-concept and his or her attitudes of self-acceptance or self-rejection (see also Hetherington & Parke, 1979). It has been consistently observed that the type of school, school organization, and teacher-pupil relationships all influence children's self-concepts (Metcalfe, 1981).

The school understandably has a diverse impact on children. It is here that the child's capabilities to succeed in life are often formed, shaped, and maintained. Recently, administrators have begun to focus on the "basics" of education; it is hoped that by teaching the basics (e.g., reading, writing, and mathematical skills), the child will acquire the abilities to succeed in his or her subsequent academic career. However, the "back-to-basics" movement has a hidden aspect that presents a serious problem to the schools. Throughout the United States, educators have increasingly advocated the use of "minimum competence" as a criterion for grade promotion. This practice has important implications for children. The primary question is, If minimum competencies in the basics are the

criteria for academic success, what is to be done with the students who do not meet these standards? The traditional answer to this question is to retain children in grade until they have reached the appropriate mastery level. It seems that this solution is not uncommon; approximately 1 million American children are involved in this process annually (Jackson, 1975).

The subject of grade retention has generated substantial theoretical, empirical, and practical attention for almost a century. However, at the present time, there are few conclusive statements regarding this widespread practice, and mixed results continue to abound in the literature. The term "grade retention" itself tends to evoke numerous definitions and rationales. A retained child has been defined as "a child who is compelled to repeat an entire year in the same grade, giving the child an added chance for classroom success" (Kerzner, 1982). Grade retention has been used synonymously with terms such as repeating, flunking, and nonpromotion. The year of retention has also been referred to as "a year to grow." Rationales for grade retention usually include below average performance on certain standards of academic achievement and/or "social maturity" (Plummer & Graziano, 1982). According to Eshel and Klein (1981), two school criteria are usually employed in retention decisions: (a) teachers' ratings or marks, and (b) performance on objective achievement tests. There are, however, several other factors that influence the retention decision. These factors have included (a) various demographic factors of the child (e.g., socioeconomic level [Safer, Heaton, & Allen, 1977]), (b) the teacher's educational philosophy (e.g., whether or not a teacher endorses the "back-to-basics" philosophy [Bossing & Brien, 1980]), (c) school policy (e.g., the adherence to automatic promotion

policy [Reiter, 1973]), and (d) the child's classroom behavior (Caplan, 1973).

These extraneous factors have also been confounding factors in empirical research. There are numerous possible explanations for this situation--most particularly, the fact that there is little available evidence on the topic and that which is available is often inconclusive at best. Researchers generally focus on the academic progress made by students who have been retained, while grade retention can affect the children in other areas as well. Most important is the fact that there is no consistent, generally accepted basis for nonpromotion. Children may be retained due to deficiencies in academic performance or to deficiencies in "social maturity." Further, there may be no consistent relationship between the achievement and ability of the student and his or her nonpromotion. Surveys of student progress reveal that children with low achievement have been promoted and children with higher achievement have been failed (Jackson, 1975). Earlier reports also revealed that schools with higher average achievement levels often fail a larger percentage of students than do schools with lower average achievement levels (Caswell & Foshay, 1957).

As alluded to earlier, reports on nonpromotion yield mixed results with respect to effects on the child. These reports have, on occasions, supported the policy of nonpromotion (Ames, 1981; Chase, 1968), whereas contrasting research has discussed the detrimental effects of nonpromotion (Abidin, Golladay, & Howerton, 1971; Dobbs & Neville, 1967). Supportive studies have noted academic, social, and personal improvements in retained children. These studies have posited improvements in achievement, peer relationships, and self-concept. Nonsupportive studies, which outnumber supportive studies, have discussed the negative impact of nonpromotion.

Even though the literature on the effects of grade retention yields mixed results, statistics indicate that the general trends are somewhat consistent. For instance, Ayers (1909) reported the first comprehensive analysis on the progress of children from grade to grade. He concluded that the rate of grade retention was significantly higher in the first grade than it was for other grades and that the rate of grade retention was higher for boys than for girls. These results have been replicated (Abidin, Golladay, & Howerton, 1971; Caswell & Foshay, 1957; Coffield, 1954; Jackson, 1975; Keyes, 1911; Sandin, 1944). The major difference noted in this research has been the rate of grade retention variance in different cities and states, the range being between 2% and 20%. According to Jackson (1975), there are marked differences for nonpromotion for minority and nonminority students (respectively, 0.7% and 0.4% in Minnesota, Oregon, and Utah, and in Louisiana, 7.9% and 3.6%).

Dillon (1975) states that dropout rates and excessive absenteeism attest to the fact that school is an obstacle rather than a help for a large number of children who seek entry into the mainstream of American life. This segment of children may experience a sense of failure and alienation because for them failure is built into the educational system. In these cases the children face failure (and possible retention), which may suppress their future abilities and competencies. They start to feel unsuccessful, impotent, and alienated because of failure feedback; this feedback can lead to the humiliation and alienation of children in their early years in school. The process can create a self-fulfilling prophecy and reduce aspirations for children and teachers. Thus, school systems can inadvertently "train" children to expect to fail and to eventually see themselves as failures (Dillon, 1975). Similarly, according to Sandin (1944), grade

retention serves as an official reminder, indicating to the child that he or she has failed in some important aspect.

An empirical investigation (Sandin, 1944) was designed to assess the emotional and social adjustment of regularly promoted and nonpromoted children. Sandin obtained information from observations in the classrooms and student records showing that nonpromotion resulted in the children's being placed with classmates who were younger, smaller, and in many cases, less mature. He concluded that a student who is retained because of academic deficiencies continues to grow physically as well as socially (that is, in terms of his or her social attitudes and aspirations). Hence, Sandin found that children who had been retained did not consider their younger, regularly promoted classmates appropriate companions.

The effects of grade retention continue to deserve close scrutiny. Current attention should logically pursue the academic and social consequences of nonpromotion. Reviews of the literature prompt many questions: (a) Does retaining children in grade subsequently increase their academic performance? (b) What are children's perceptions of their peers who are retained? (c) Do other children discriminate against children who are retained? (d) Do retained children have different expectations about their performance, school, and teachers than do their nonretained counterparts? and (e) Is children's self-esteem affected by grade retention?

A thorough examination of the relevant information is needed. The present discussion will attempt to synthesize the results of empirical research--in other words, to provide a convergent analysis of available information. Specifically, the first section will summarize available data to ascertain the effects of grade retention on children's academic performance.

The second section will present information about the social behaviors of children who have been retained; available data include information on how the perceptions of others can influence children's school performance and their interactions with peers. The third section will summarize data regarding the effects of grade retention on the child's self-esteem. Finally, in the fourth section, some conclusive statements and proposed directions for future research on the effects of grade retention will be offered.

ACADEMIC CONSEQUENCES OF GRADE RETENTION

Academic achievement is generally measured as scholastic success shown by the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (Kerzner, 1982). The tests employed in this battery are standardized; thus, normative data are based on large populations and can be assumed to have adequate reliability and validity. On some occasions, grades assigned by teachers are used to evaluate academic progress. If a student evidences subaverage performance on the basic skills test (which includes areas such as reading and mathematics) and/or displays general academic difficulties in course work (e.g., failing to complete homework assignments), he or she may be retained and viewed as an academic failure. In the early years of schooling, this feedback may be especially problematic to the young child who has had an abundance of successful experiences prior to school (Dillon, 1975). After the initial encounter of failure, however, these target children may be involved in a vicious cycle of failure. One experience of failure tends to make subsequent failure that much easier (Dillon, 1975). The aforementioned cycle entails a label of failure by teachers and peers as well as internalized feelings of failure. In general, this cycle involves the following steps: (a) the student may think that he or she is a total failure

because of a single unsuccessful episode in the academic area, (b) this feeling may be intensified due to teacher and peer group perceptions of academic failure, and (c) the perceived feedback by these significant others may support the target child's perception of self as failure. Important questions at this point are, If this cycle exists, is it changed, either positively or negatively, by nonpromotion? and, Does nonpromotion produce positive effects on or improve future academic performance? These questions have been vigorously debated in the literature.

Historical Overview

As early as 1840, the problem of nonpromotion was evidenced when elementary education was divided into eight grade levels (Bossing & Brien, 1980). If a student mastered the appropriate content area of a given grade, then he or she was promoted to the next grade level. Early in the 20th century, however, the prospect of nonpromotion was entertained because of growing concern about the student who could not master academic material at the designated grade level. The retention year, theoretically, would provide a chance for the child to "catch up" academically by being exposed to materials more suited to his or her academic ability. Thus, the child would have additional time to learn required material (Bossing & Brien, 1980). From the early 1800s to the 1930s, it was a common educational practice to require students to remain in grades where academic mastery was a problem and thus to provide time for the additional work needed (Hess, Martin, Parker, & Beck, 1978).

Numerous studies have been conducted to test the effects of nonpromotion on academic achievement. As early as 1911, Keyes conducted a 4-year study including 5,000 pupils in an identified school district. The results of this study indicated that, of the large number of retainees, 20%

did better academically, 39% showed no change, and 40% actually did worse.

Several other early investigations generally support the findings of Keyes. Buckingham (1926) found that a small percentage (approximately one-third) of several thousand children did better academic work after repeating a grade. McKinney (1928) evaluated repeaters above the first grade and found that 35% did better work the second time, 53% did not improve, and 12% did poorer work. Klene and Branson (1929) equated children on the bases of chronological age, mental age, and sex and, in turn, identified potential repeaters. Their results indicated that, as measured by achievement scores, potential repeaters profited more from promotion than did repeaters from nonpromotion. A study by Arthur (1936) again supported this early research trend. This investigator compared the achievement of 60 first-grade repeaters with the achievement of nonrepeaters of the same mental age (as based on inteliigence testing), indicating that the average repeater did not learn more in 2 years than the average nonrepeater learned in 1 year.

In 1933, Farley, Frey, and Garland studied children with low IQ's who repeated several grades. These students were compared with children who had the same ability as measured by IQ but who had not been retained. It was found that retained children were not doing as well in their school work as children of the same ability who had not been exposed to nonpromotion. These findings indicated that retention, in this case, was more likely to be a deterrent than an impetus to acceptable academic achievement. In another comparison study, Goffield's (1954) results indicated the long range consequences of achievement and nonpromotion. Failed and promoted pupils who evidenced comparable achievement levels at

the time of failure showed no significant academic differences when the achievement of both was measured at a later date (specifically, when pupils were in the seventh grade).

These very early studies appear, then, to indicate that repeaters actually achieve no better the second time in the grade than they do the first time. In fact, many students seem to do poorer work the second time. Of course, this very early research cannot be generalized to current school systems. However, it appears that the early trends in nonpromotion research are fairly negative in that the results indicate no positive benefits of retention. Saunders (1941) reviewed the early research regarding elementary school retention and offered these summary statements:

> From the evidence cited, it may be concluded that nonpromotion of pupils in elementary schools in order to assure mastery of subject matter does not accomplish its objectives. Children do not appear to learn more by repeating a grade but experience less growth in subject matter achievement than they do when promoted. (p. 29)

Subsequent research has basically been supportive of this earlier notion that retention rarely produces positive changes in academic achievement. For example, Dobbs and Neville (1967) evaluated the effects of nonpromotion on the achievement of 15 once-retained first graders and compared them with 15 never-retained second graders. These identified groups were matched on sex, race, age, socioeconomic level, mental ability, reading achievement, and type of classroom assignment. The investigators concluded that nonpromotion was not an aid to achievement.

Abidin, Gollady, and Howerton (1971) concurred with the premise of Dobbs and Neville (1967) and other retention researchers. Abidin et al. offered support for the ongoing deterioration of both achievement and ability level as a function of nonpromotion. Investigating a group of 85 students who had been retained in the first and second grade, these researchers found that decreases in both achievement and ability continued for this group through the sixth grade. The study also indicated that several nonacademic variables significantly influence the retention decision during the first 2 years of school. An analysis of the demographic data indicated that the parents of prospective retainees are crucial in this process. Among the demographic factors measured in this study were race, sex, socioeconomic level of family, initial intelligence, and father absence. It was suggested that sex, race, and socioeconomic status are crucial determinants in retention decisions. In addition, black male students from low socioeconomic families in which the mother worked and the father was absent were found to be likely candidates for retention. It should be emphasized that retained children evidenced continuing academic deterioration after their initial encounter with the failure process. This process was discussed by Glasser (1969), who noted that "once the child receives the failure label and sees himself as a failure, he will rarely succeed in school."

Further documentation of this notion was offered by Godfrey (1971), who presented the results of a 1970 research project by the North Carolina Advancement School comparing students who had been retained with those who had not been retained. Approximately 1,200 sixth- and seventh-grade students from 14 representative schools served as the sample population. The results indicated that nonretainees were reading at a 6.8 grade level.

The students who had repeated one grade, however, were reading at a 5.2 level, whereas students repeating two or more grades had dropped to a 4.5 grade level. Regarding mathematical achievement, it was found that nonretainees averaged in the 27th percentile. One-time repeaters averaged in the 10th percentile, and chronic repeaters (those who had repeated grades two or more times) were in the 5th percentile. In comparing nonretainees with those students once or twice retained, Godfrey found results indicating that years of retention can be an academic handicap to students in terms of decreasing their performance. This implies that subsequent failures could be a detriment to academic performance. The theoretical principle of retention allowing students to "catch up" is once again challenged.

Potential Benefits Versus Negative Effects

Before reaching final conclusions about the effect of grade retention, an examination of the contrasting literature is in order. In 1973, Reiter reviewed the literature on the policies of automatic promotion versus rigid retention for academically deficient pupils. These extreme positions did not offer a viable solution to pupils' problems. However, promotion appeared to have fewer disadvantages than retention. Generally, it was noted that repeaters evidence motivational problems in that they appear to be somewhat discouraged by their actual and perceived failure. Additionally, when compared with nonrepeaters, the repeaters did not fare better at the end of their schooling.

One could therefore logically question whether retention, or the threat of retention, serves as a motivating force to facilitate academic performance. The motivational aspects of nonpromotion have been treated as a subcomponent of academic achievement. Several teachers believe that

children are prompted to work by the threat of nonpromotion. In an effort to test this hypothesis, Otto and Melby (1935) evaluated the performance of second- and fifth-grade students who received different information about retention at the beginning of the school semester. These investigators found that telling children at the beginning of a semester that all of them would be passed to the following grade the next term did not change their behavior (i.e., this information did not make students less motivated to work or learn). More specifically regarding criteria for change, these children did as well on a comprehensive achievement test as did children who throughout the semester were reminded, or threatened, of the possibility of nonpromotion. Other research findings (Caswell, 1933; Farley, Frey, & Garland, 1933) indicate that nonpromotion does not serve as a motivating factor; instead, nonpromotion may be more of a deterrent than an impetus to acceptable achievement levels. Even further, evidence suggests that the threat of nonpromotion primarily motivates children to work if they are in no real danger of being retained (Kowitz & Armstrong, 1961).

Nonpromotion, however, has not consistently produced universally detrimental effects on children's achievement. As Saunders indicated in his 1941 review, following nonpromotion, the majority of children studied did not receive higher grades as judged by teachers or score higher on group achievement tests. Yet this evidence is not conclusive. Three studies reviewed by Saunders indicated that nearly one-third of the children displayed favorable academic gains during the retained year (Buckingham, 1926; Keyes, 1911; McKinney, 1928). Additionally, Lobdell (1954) stated that approximately 69% of retainees may be expected to evidence good or fair progress when and if careful selection criteria are employed. This notion has been supported by recent literature:

Since 1965, researchers in the retention area have postulated that maximal learning can occur in retainees if proper steps are taken. According to these reports, the crucial issue relates to how the individual student is treated in the school. The issue of treatment relates to the processes of promotion and retention alike (Reiter, 1973). For example, humanistic treatment of a pupil indicates that the student is valued and worthy of creative provision of appropriate learning tasks that will produce academic success. In this case, special reward systems could be implemented for the retainee who evidences academic progress. These rewards might include verbal reinforcement that would enhance the child's self-esteem.

In an extensive 2-year study, Sandoval and Hughes (1981) conducted a research project for two purposes: (a) to identify characteristics of children who profited from retention, and (b) to identify the factors in the retained group that facilitated success after failure. The subject sample in this study was 146 first graders who had been identified as potential repeaters. Of this number, 84 remained in the first grade and 62 were promoted. The researchers individually tested the children in an effort to assess academic achievement, perceptual-motor ability, interpersonal relationships, intelligence, and cognitive and physical development. Additionally, parent and teacher interviews were conducted. The results of this extensive report indicated that the child's family background, early life experiences, physical size, and visual-motor development are, along with teacher philosophy, relatively unimportant determinants of whether or not the child evidences subsequent success from the repeated years. It appeared that the best predictors of successful retention outcomes are the child's initial status in three areas: academic skills, emotional develop-

ment, and social skills. More specifically, when compared with less successful retainees, successful retainees initially had the highest level of achievement (i.e., better academic skills), the highest self-concept (i.e., greater self-esteem), the best social skills (i.e., good interpersonal skills), and the most involved parents. Subsequent analysis indicated that, when comparing the successful retainees with a promoted group of children, the successful retained group was inferior to the promoted group only in mathematical achievement. In other measured areas, the successful retained group was equivalent to or, in the case of emotional adjustment, superior to the promoted group.

These results indicate that a successful nonpromotion may enhance the overall development of the child. However, Sandoval and Hughes (1981) warn readers to be cautious in accepting the results of their study concretely. Primary cautionary notes concern (a) the data reduction procedures employed, which "simply selected variables with good psychometric properties and good correlations with other variables" (p. 150), and (b) the fact that this study evaluated retainees for only 1 year after nonpromotion.

Kerzner (1982) also investigated the educational merit of retaining low achieving elementary school students in the same grade for a designated time period. The subjects in this study were 56 students who had progressed and completed one grade beyond the retained grade. The progress of this group was evaluated by their performance on the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills. Both preretention and postretention test scores were compared. The results revealed some positive aspects of retention. It was found that, overall, retention was academically beneficial to students in all grades observed; however, retained childen in second or third grades appeared to have evidenced the greatest positive effects.

Other researchers also support the positive aspects of nonpromotion. Ames (1981) stated that retention is generally not accompanied by emotional or social difficulties. Even further, Ames suggests that retention tends to result in improved grades. Many teachers and parents thus support retention because they feel the positive aspects of the process outweigh the negative aspects.

Chase (1968) also indicated that 75% of 65 first-, second- and third-grade children studied had no emotional upset after retention and that only 16% had temporary emotional upheaval. It should be noted that, in this study, most parents (approximately 95%) were supportive of the retention decision and stated that they observed positive changes in their children after they were retained.

Special programs for retained children have been shown to be effective. One such innovative program in Virginia, The Greensville Program, addressed the issue of nonpromotion and achievement. This program, implemented by Owens and Ranick (1977), set forth a strict ground rule: "No students would be promoted until they showed, on achievement tests, the mastery of the skills for their grades" (p. 531). This achievement-oriented program has produced respectable success rates--that is, the number of retainees is declining and achievement test scores are increasing. More specifically, this program, which began in 1973, showed that not only was the number of students retained in grade declining but achievement test scores had risen. Students previously scoring in the bottom 20 to 30% nationwide on achievement tests had risen to the top 50 to 60%. Additionally, students displayed a more positive attitude about testing, their IQ scores increased, and the dropout rate declined. A similar guideline, one that does not suggest promoting students who are 1 year or more below

grade level, has been incorporated in the New York City schools ("Must We Promote," 1974). These programs or guidelines in essence support the notion of retention as a motivating factor.

Qualifications on the Research

With the aforementioned information in mind, one may wonder about the role of nonpromotion in academic achievement. Unfortunately, there are no straightforward answers to the questions raised. Research in this area supports both sides of the argument; some investigations support the retention policy, while the majority opposes nonpromotion. Haddad (1979), for example, states that educational expenditures are poorly made when a student repeats a grade. Haddad further states that supporters of nonpromotion believe or assume that (a) academic factors determine success and failure, (b) achievement tests are reliable and valid, (c) some skills are best learned at designated grade levels, and (d) children who are placed at similar developmental levels are at an advantage emotionally. To compound an already complicated problem, as stated previously, nonacademic factors also play a crucial role in the retention decision. Classroom conduct (Caplan, 1973) as well as socioeconomic status (Safer, Heaton, & Allen, 1977) have been cited as two such factors.

It should be noted that, generally, studies that support grade retention have included qualifying remarks. These studies do not suggest that nonpromotion is good for all low achieving students. Recent research has suggested an appropriate time for retention (very early in the student's academic career--e.g., first grade) (Kerzner, 1982) as well as an appropriate student for retention (those who have learned some academic material, particularly reading; good self-concepts; and adequate social skills) (Sandoval & Hughes, 1981). Even further, some researchers (Bocks,

1977; Bossing & Brien, 1980) suggest a more human approach to retention that seeks to accentuate the positive aspects of retention and the positive aspects of the student. Specifically, Bocks (1977) has suggested that teachers should individualize their academic programs. This process may aid teachers in preparing lessons for the children in their classes, and familiarity may also help teachers to determine the special needs of each individual sudent. Further suggestions have been made by Bossing and Brien (1980), who indicate that support from parents, teachers, and the principal is essential when making the decision to retain a child. Parents, for example, should be knowledgeable about the child's progress throughout the year. A possible retention decision should be discussed with the parents early in the academic year, perhaps at a mid-year conference. This process should make the parents more comfortable with the retention decision, and, in turn, the parents may facilitate adjustment for the child.

GRADE RETENTION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

In order to understand the potential effects of grade retention on children, it is necessary to consider the different areas of the child's life on which retention could have an impact. The young child is not an automated being in which the only expected impact of grade retention is on the child's intellect, but rather a growing social organism. As such, the influence of the school on intellectual and social development must be simultaneously examined.

As previously stated, Sandin (1944) designed a study in which he assessed the social and emotional adjustment of regularly promoted and nonpromoted students. The findings showed that children who had been retained did not consider their younger, regularly promoted classmates appropriate companions. Sandin concluded that these differences as well

as others (e.g., differences in behavior, interests, and likes and dislikes) between the regularly promoted and nonpromoted students create a barrier to good social relations. In particular, Sandin stated that students who were retained isolated themselves from their regularly promoted counterparts. This type of social isolation was confounded further by the fact that retained students were not able to socialize during school hours with their preferred companions from the upper grades, who were more like them in many respects than their academic peers. Hence, nonpromoted students are not placed in an optimum social environment. According to Sandin,

> The difference between these groups of students as to attitudes and feelings indicated that the general outlook of the slow-progress pupils (i.e., retained) toward the school environment was not as favorable or as indicative of a happy adjustment as that of their regularly-promoted classmates. Many of them (i.e., those who were retained) wanted to quit school and were easily discouraged or considerably worried about their future school progress. (p. 135)

Similarly, Caswell and Foshay (1957) concluded that the nonpromoted will suffer from depression and discouragement. The personality of the child is affected, most often unfavorably, by nonpromotion (cf. Finlayson, 1975). The explanation of this phenomenon offered by Caswell and Foshay (1957) is that children cannot discover the relationships between their activities and outcomes and hence do not see a road to success. This ambiguity will inadvertently lead to distrust of social and/or academic abilities and very often to expectations of further failure.

The studies by Caswell and Foshay (1957) and Sandin (1944) are important because they suggest that peer reactions may have a strong influence on a child's adjustment to school. If retained children are rejected or are targets of discrimination in their new classes, then academic and familial problems associated with retention will be compounded, and self-evaluation may suffer further.

Johnson (1981) reported that children who have experienced chronic failure in school (i.e., failed at least 3 years) develop feelings of learned helplessness. On the other hand, some investigators have claimed that nonpromotion is not detrimental to the child (e.g., Chase, 1972; Saunders, 1941). These mixed results suggest the possibility of other mediating factors that could affect the relationship between grade retention and the social development of children.

Status Generalization

The notion that the child is affected by factors other than purely academic ones is further corroborated by research suggesting that peers play an important role in the socialization of children (Graziano & Shaffer, 1979; Gump, 1980; Hetherington & Parke, 1979). Peer influence, like school influence, extends beyond intellectual development into the general realm of social development (see Centra & Potter, 1980). In other words, peers can serve as models for comparisons as well as reinforcers for behaviors defined as appropriate by the peer group. Accordingly, those youngsters who engage in behaviors valued by their peers are reinforced (i.e., rewarded) for doing so, while those youngsters who do not behave in this manner are generally not well-liked by their peers (see Graziano & Shaffer, 1979).

The implications of such findings are that status differences evoke differential evaluations about individuals and provide a basis for inferring differences in other capacities or characteristics possessed by the individual. Assumptions made about a person on the basis of his or her status category seem to be of two kinds. Specific expectations are formed about capacities that are relevant to the interaction itself; general expectations (also referred to as "diffuse" expectations) are formed about capacities that may extend beyond the context of the interaction (Berger & Fisek, 1970). The process of status generalization could help in determining how relevant and/or irrelevant factors could operate to influence children's perceptions of their peers. Several investigations have observed that children have conceptions that appear to be stereotyped about appropriate occupations for males and females, and for peers younger and older than themselves (e.g., Feather, 1975; Graziano, Musser, Rosen, & Shaffer, 1982; Thelen & Kirkland, 1976). Furthermore, children assume different statuses and roles within the peer group. These group-defined attributes determine the relationship of each child to other members of the group (Graziano & Shaffer, 1979).

An illustration will clarify this point: In accordance with status generalization theory (Webster & Driskell, 1978), children could possibly perceive a child who has been retained as having lower status than their regularly promoted counterparts. These differential status evaluations would determine the relationship between retained and nonretained children (cf. Walster & Walster, 1975). For instance, it is possible that the grade-retained child who performed as well as the nonretained child on a school-related task would be evaluated less favorably by his or her peers.

An extensive investigation by Plummer and Graziano (1982) provides a test of the aforementioned implications. Plummer and Graziano predicted that (a) children who are regularly promoted would be preferred for a school-related task such as helping work math problems (i.e., specific expectations), and (b) regularly promoted children would also be preferred for a school-irrelevant task such as playing on a playground (i.e., diffuse expectations). These hypotheses were tested using a sample of 219 children: 105 second graders (65 females and 40 males) and 114 fifth graders (53 females and 61 males). A total of 46% of the population had been retained in grades, while 54% had not been retained.

The data indicated that 75% of the sample chose the retained target child to help them with the academic task. Spontaneous comments the children made explained these unexpected results. The children stated that since the child had repeated a grade, he or she would have more experience and would be in a better position to help them than the nonretained child. However, post hoc tests showed significant differences between the nonretained fifth graders' responses and all other participants' responses. These results showed that the nonretained fifth graders preferred other nonretained children to help them with the academic task. Differential social cognitions are suggested by these results. The older children seem to focus on the implications of being retained, whereas the younger children seem to reason that being retained and older implies more experience, hence more helpfulness. Nonetheless, given that the majority of the children preferred the retained older target child to assist them, it was concluded that there was no support for the prediction as stated.

Support was revealed for the second prediction, however. The majority (55%) of the children in this study preferred to play with the

nonretained younger target child rather than the retained older target child. Significant main effects for grade status and grade were revealed. The nonretained raters preferred the younger nonretained play partner more often than they preferred the retained partner; the retained raters preferred the retained partner more often than they preferred the nonretained partner. Furthermore, the younger children (second graders) preferred the retained older target child more often than did the older fifth graders. It appears as though younger children would prefer to play with someone older, whereas older children would prefer a same-age playmate. Again, since the majority of the children had a significant preference for the nonretained play partner, it was concluded that there was support for the diffuse-expectation hypothesis.

These findings are noteworthy in that they suggest age can influence peer evaluations. Specifically, whereas the older retained child may be evaluated more positively by younger children, he or she may not be rated as positively by same-age peers. Hence, grade retention could hinder the retained child's social relations with same-age peers.

Furthermore, the results of this investigation are particularly noteworthy for two other reasons. First, the participants were not told that the stimulus children had been retained in grades. This was done so that the stimulus children would not be labeled as retained and thus create a response bias in the sample population. Participants were shown two 13 x 9 cm Polaroid color snapshots and were asked, "Can you guess why these children are in the same grade and one is older than the other?" The responses to this question revealed significant main effects for grade status and grade. The nonretained participants reliably identified the retained stimulus children more often than did the retained participants.

Similarly, fifth graders identified the retained stimulus children more often than did second graders. Duncan's multiple range test showed that these differences were significant at the .05 level. Overall, 56% of the sample "guessed" correctly, 23% missed, and 10% of the participants did not respond.

Second, the investigators designed a procedure to counterbalance the height and grade status of the stimulus children. The height of the stimulus children was manipulated independently of grade status since previous research has shown that height (size) can influence children's social judgments (e.g., Graziano, 1978; Graziano, Musser, Rosen, & Shaffer, 1982). Therefore, in one condition, the target children were labelled "correctly." In other words, the taller child was labelled as older (9 and 12 years of age for second and fifth graders, respectively). In the other condition, the target children were labelled in the reverse order. In other words, the taller target child was labelled as younger (7 and 10 years of age for second and fifth graders, respectively), and the shorter target child was said to be older. A significant Condition x Gender disordinal interaction emerged, suggesting that male and female participants react differently to relative size. The female participants could identify the retained target child more often in the retained-shorter condition than in the retained-taller condition. However, this occurrence was reversed for males; they identified the retained target child less often in the retained-shorter condition than in the retained-taller condition.

As such, these data are significant because of the suggestion that children are aware of their retained peers and that differential perceptions are formed for retained and nonretained stimulus children even when height of the stimulus children is counterbalanced.

Equity Theory

If retained children are rejected or are targets of discrimination in their new classes, then academic and familial problems associated with retention will be compounded, and self-evaluation may suffer further. Although the precise mechanism responsible for such discrimination remains unclear, some clues may be found in the literature on equity theory. Equity theory states that judgments of deservingness are an integral part of resource exchanges that characterize social behavior. A social exchange is equitable when resources (outcomes) are dispensed in proportion to contributions or inputs (Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973). Thus, a worker who does 20% of the work deserves 20% of the available resources.

From the perspective of equity theory, it could be argued that rejection and peer discrimination against the retained child may be seen as the deserved outcome for the input of poor school performance. By itself, this interpretation is too simplistic. The retained child may actually outperform his or her nonretained peers on at least some school-related tasks due to greater familiarity with some of the materials. If, however, the equity formulation is expanded to allow additional inputs beyond relative school performance, then the equity interpretation may be more plausible.

In naturally occurring circumstances, children are confronted with information about accomplishments within a context of other information that may be at least as salient as task performance (Graziano, 1978; Leventhal & Michaels, 1971; Thelen & Kirkland, 1976). It is these other salient, yet diffuse, items of information (e.g., size, race, grade status) that can function as inputs and hence mediators in children's perceptions of their peers (Graziano et al., 1982).

The results of these empirical equity studies suggest that task performance is not the only basis for children's judgments of deservingness (Leventhal & Michaels, 1971). Walster and Walster (1975) proposed that these contextual determinants (i.e., status attributes associated with the individual, such as physical strength, gender, and race) come to be seen as inputs. Thus, they are mediators in the distribution of resources.

Plummer and Graziano (1982) utilized an allocation task to assess the influence of children's grade status (i.e., retained or nonretained) in the distribution of resources. Students were shown color photographs of two unfamiliar children who were of the same race, sex, and grade as the participant. For second graders, one stimulus child (i.e., the child in the photograph) was taller and older than his or her counterpart. The student was told that the ages of the children in the photographs were 9 and 7 years, respectively. For fifth graders, the student was told that the stimulus children's ages were 12 and 10 years, respectively. Underneath each stimulus child's photograph was a printed portion of a story that the stimulus child allegedly had read. The students were asked to give each stimulus child as many prize chips as they thought he or she should have for reading the story. It was predicted that, given comparable task performance, the regularly promoted stimulus child would receive more rewards than would children who had been retained. Accordingly, the students observed the retained child when he or she had read more than, less than, and the same as his or her nonretained counterpart.

The data indicated that evidence of discrimination occurred in the reward-allocation task when the retained and nonretained child's performances were equal. Results suggest the subtle influences grade status could have on children's perceptions of their peers. Both second and fifth

graders allocated fewer prize chips to the taller retained child than to their nonretained counterparts, even though their performance was equal (i.e., they had read the identical portion of the story). There was a notable exception to this occurrence, however. The nonretained second-grade raters allocated more prize chips to the taller retained child in the dyad. Intuitively, this can be understood: Size is a more salient (i.e., highly visible) cue to the younger raters and is thus more likely to influence their judgments than is task performance (Graziano et al., 1982). In contrast, older children (fifth graders) are more aware of "social cues," and from the aforementioned results, they appear to have lower expectations about the grade-retained child than about the nonretained child.

It was concluded that there was some support for the predictions that the retained child would be the recipient of discriminatory acts. The retained children received fewer rewards even when their performance was equal to that of the nonretained children; however, this effect appears to be moderated by the height of retained children. As noted earlier, this investigation also showed that retained children were not preferred for the school-irrelevant task, yet they were preferred for the school-relevant task. Noteworthy findings were that these effects can be enhanced or debilitated by the height of the retained target child in comparison with that of the nonretained target child and by the grade status and grade of the raters.

When holding sex of first graders constant, Asbury (1975) found that underachievers (i.e., those whose performances are below their grade level) were selected less frequently by their peers than were other children and that these underachievers had a lower level of personality adjustment than did their counterparts. These results are consistent with

the conclusions of Chase (1972). Chase proposed that a child who does not compete successfully in school could develop problems in living and in coping with his or her environment. This proposal is not inconsistent with Chase's (1972) additional conclusion that nonpromotion is not as detrimental as previously believed. Chase clarifies her position by stating that careful selection of the child who is retained and consistent monitoring of that child's progress is necessary to alleviate or decrease the possible negative effects of grade retention.

Peer Perceptions and Relationships

These studies and others outlined earlier suggest another way, in addition to equity theory and status generalization, to consider peer reactions to children who have been retained. It is conceivable that a grade-retained child is seen as somehow "different" by his or her nonretained peers. However, little information is available on the ways children interact with other children who are seen as being different from themselves (cf. Hartup, 1979; Lippitt, Polansky, & Rosen, 1952). For example, Lougee, Goldman, and Hartup (1977) note that most knowledge of peer relations is based on studies in which children are highly similar to each other in age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, mental and physical capabilities, etc. In particular, when grade-retained children interact with their new classmates, a special case of naturally occurring mixed-age interaction may be observed.

Established literature now demonstrates that children's interactions do differ in same-age and mixed-age contexts (Furman, Rahe, & Hartup, 1979; Goldman, 1981; Graziano, French, Brownell, & Hartup, 1976; Shatz & Gelman, 1973). The bulk of this research has stressed the potential ameliorative and therapeutic effects of mixed-age interaction. For example,

Furman et al. (1979) found that by pairing a socially withdrawn older child with a younger partner, the socially withdrawn older child becomes more socially interactive with agemates.

Ameliorative effects may indeed occur in dyadic interaction, but there is also the possibility that the larger social context can make mixed-age interactions detrimental to the individual older child. In the natural ecology of elementary schools, for example, mixed-age interaction occurs when children are retained in grade. Such grade retention may or may not ameliorate academic differences, but evidence suggests that unless explicit measures are developed and implemented, social development may be detrimentally affected. This information is further supported by research that indicates academic performance is highly related to social adjustment (e.g., Caswell & Foshay, 1957; Dillon, 1975; Entwisle and Hayduk, 1978; Plummer & Graziano, 1982; Sandin, 1944).

Plummer and Graziano (1982) predicted that children who were retained would have less favorable social cognitions and expectancies about themselves and their school surroundings than would children who were regularly promoted. The results pertaining to this prediction indicated that retained and nonretained children did have different perceptions about their environment. However, the results of these measures are not conclusive. A total of 46% of the population did not give "codable" responses. Perhaps the students were not able to respond in such an abstract manner; support is suggested for this possibility in that more fifth graders (56%) than second graders (32%) responded. Nonetheless, interpretations of these results are difficult. Clearly, more research is needed in this area; such research would employ more concrete dimensions for the younger, less cognitively sophisticated student.

Support for this prediction was not indicated, even though there were significant main effects and high-order interactions on the reading expectancy measure. For instance, nonretained and retained fifth graders expected similar grades, but the nonretained second graders expected higher grades than did their retained counterparts. It is possible that older children have a "reality constraint" that allows them to consider the responsibilities (e.g., effort, abilities, task difficulties) required of them to receive high grades; support for this contention is suggested by the fact that even retained second graders (who are older than their nonretained counterparts) expected lower grades than did their nonretained classmates.

The possibility that grade retention does in fact influence children's perceptions about their peers has been substantiated. However, Plummer and Graziano (1982) also suggest that the grade status of the rater, the level of the rater's social cognition abilities (e.g., grade level), and the height of the retained child could mediate children's perceptions of their retained peers. These speculations warrant further research.

IMPACT OF GRADE RETENTION ON SELF-EVALUATION

In recent years, as part of the "back-to-basics" movement in education, questions have been raised about the socialization mission of the schools. Some writers have argued, for example, that schools should focus their attention on developing children's fundamental academic competencies rather than on developing "tangential" qualities like self-concept (see Lerner, 1981). Nonetheless, there is evidence that qualities like self-concept are related to academic performance.

An Overview of Research

Wattenberg and Clifford (1964) successfully predicted reading achievement 2½ years beyond the time that measures of self-concept were procured from kindergarteners. Similarly, Lamy (1965) suggested that self-perceptions and IQ in kindergarten predicted reading achievement in first grade equally well. Brookover, Thomas, and Patterson (1974) also found that student self-conceptions of ability predicted school performance better than IQ. Entwisle and Hayduk (1978) provide data that further support the relationship between self-esteem and the school environment: Specifically, by the end of the third grade, even before the age competent reading and writing skills are acquired, children have developed fairly stable and complex self-images. How well children are doing academically at that age is a good long term indicator of school performance. The implication of this finding is that school performance can be enhanced or debilitated as a function of the student's self-esteem.

Unfortunately, most of these claims are difficult to evaluate since very few studies have systematically investigated the impact of grade retention on self-esteem. Finlayson (1975) assumed that the few studies done in this area were inadequate in the sense that they were retrospective and often "one-shot" assessments. According to Finlayson (1975), these type of investigations cannot answer the basic question--that is, Does school failure cause a poor self evaluation, or does a poor self evaluation cause school failure? The basic argument of the present analysis is that it is not beneficial to isolate these two factors. As stated previously, the literature suggests that academic performance is related to three factors: self-evaluation, self-expectations, and social adjustment. It is argued that whether or not a child is successful in school can be deter-

mined by the degree of consistency among these factors. For example, actual academic performance is said to influence children's self-evaluations and self-concept by gradually becoming a part of a reciprocal feedback system. That is, actual academic performance influences self-evaluation, which in turn influences subsequent academic performance.

At least two school-related factors may mediate the potential effects of grade retention on self-evaluations. The first of these is teachers' attitudes toward students and their performance (e.g., Adams, 1963; Barocas, 1974; Brophy & Good, 1970; Cooper, 1979; Lerner & Lerner, 1977; Rich, 1975; Rist, 1970; Seaver, 1975). Teacher expectations are considered a primary source of information about expected abilities that shape children's self-concepts--particularly the expectancies children hold about their capability for academic performance (Braun, 1976; Brophy & Good, 1974; Good, 1980; Weinstein, Marshall, Brattesani, & Sharp, 1980). Research indicates that achievement is affected in that the child internalizes information from the teacher-pupil interactions into self-expectations and transforms the expressions of those self-expectations into behavior and academic performance (e.g., Cooper, 1970; Weinstein et al., 1980).

A second school-related factor influencing children's self-evaluation is actual academic performance, which has been discussed earlier. Initially, it is argued, a child who fails academically suffers from a lowered self-evaluation (cf. Finlayson, 1975). If repeated failure occurs, the student subsequently may come to accept his or her substandard performances (see Johnson, 1981). As such, these students' self-evaluations may no longer become affected by grade retention, in the sense that being retained is consistent with their evaluations of themselves as poor academic performers.

A Study of Self-concept

Support for this process is offered from the investigation by Plummer and Graziano (1982). As noted earlier, both retained and nonretained second and fifth graders' self-concepts were measured. It was proposed that the younger children (i.e., second graders) would have less experience in coping with grade retention and would not yet be cognitively sophisticated enough to handle the often subtle environmental implications of being retained in grade. Furthermore, it was proposed that any efforts to alleviate or decrease potential negative impacts of grade retention would be most effective at the earlier grade levels. In contrast, analysis of retained and nonretained children's self-evaluations in the fifth grade was assumed to provide a more concise assessment of the phenomenon. As well as having had more direct experience with both retained and nonretained peers than had the second graders, these older children had developed to the point of being able to process others' attitudes and expectancies about grade retention.

Following Katz and Zigler (1967), Plummer and Graziano (1982) employed a measure of difference between <u>real self-concept</u> (i.e., how children actually feel about themselves) and <u>ideal self-concept</u> (i.e., how children would like to be). This measure was labelled <u>actual self-concept</u>. A correlation matrix was constructed to determine the degree of relationship between each of the self-concept measures. As might be expected, the child's actual self-concept is highly correlated with the real self-concept measure ($r = .86$), and the actual self-concept is negatively related to the ideal self-concept measure ($r = -.24$).

Self-Concept Hypothesis

Actual self-concept. It was predicted that students who had been retained would have a lower actual self-concept than students who had not been retained. To test this hypothesis, the children's actual self-concept scores (i.e., discrepancy scores) were analyzed. Differences were found between the retained and nonretained participants; however, the differences were in the opposite direction of the prediction. Overall, retained participants' actual self-concepts were more positive than were those of the nonretained participants. There was also a significant grade status x grade interaction. Nonretained children, both second graders and fifth graders, had a lower actual self-concept than did retained second graders and fifth graders. In order to understand these results, it is necessary to review the components of the self-esteem measure separately. A discussion of these findings is presented below.

Real self-concept. This measure was used to index the children's perception of themselves (i.e., it is one component used to assess the children's actual self-concept). A grade status main effect indicated that participants who had been retained had a higher (more favorable) self-evaluation than did participants who had not been retained.

Ideal self-concept. This measure was used to assess how the children "would like to be" (i.e., their ideal self-images). The ideal self-concept component was also used to compute the children's actual self-concept. Therefore, theoretically, the closer children's real self-concept evaluation is to their ideal self-concept, the more likely it is that their actual self-concept will be more favorable than that of children who have a larger discrepancy between "how they are" (real self-concept) and "how they would like to be" (ideal self-concept).

The most pronounced effects were indicated by the univariate analysis of the children's ideal self-concept. Significant effects were revealed for gender and grade. Results indicated that the male participants had higher ideal standards than did the female participants. The fifth graders' ideal self-concept measure indicated that they had higher ideal standards than did the second graders.

Social concept. Part of the Katz and Zigler (1967) self-concept measure included a questionnaire for the assessment of children's opinion on how others saw them. This measure was utilized in the present study. The only significant effect revealed by the univariate analysis on the participant's social-concept measure was an experimenter's race x gender interaction. The results showed that black experimenters received responses that indicated a more favorable social concept from white male and black female participants than was obtained by the white experimenters. Subsequent analysis showed that white nonretained fifth-grade males had a social concept significantly lower than that of all other participants.

Based on previous research, Plummer and Graziano (1982) hypothesized that retained children would have a lower self-concept than would nonretained children. However, their data suggest that children who have been retained have an actual self-concept significantly higher than that for nonretained children.

There are two possible explanations for this finding. First, children who have been retained are placed in classrooms where the work could be repetitive. Hence, they could perform better in this situation than they did previously. Since they could also be doing comparatively better than their classmates, their self-esteem is higher. This possibility has received support by Strang, Smith, and Rogers (1978) in their investigation of the

mainstreaming phenomenon. These investigators found that, when placed in classrooms together, educationally gifted children make comparisons with "similar others." As such, their self-esteem is lower than when they are in a regular classroom, where their performance on academic tasks excels that of their classmates.

The fact that the results of Plummer and Graziano's (1982) study showed that both males and fifth graders had significantly higher ideal standards than did females and second graders, respectively, proposed another interpretation. Males are typically expected to strive for perfection in all they do, whereas society expects complaisant females. It is also suggested that, as children get older, self-standards increase. Older children have learned to accept their faults and have enough successful experiences to believe that their futures hold great promise. When the older children in this study were asked if they thought that they were smart, they would say no, but when asked if they would like to be smart, they would say yes. In contrast, the trend of the retained children's responses indicates marked consistency. When asked if they thought that they were smart, retained children would say no, and when asked if they would like to be smart, they would again say no. Since the actual self-concept is computed by the discrepancy scores between the real and ideal self-concept measures, the individual ideal standards of the children are important. It is possible that retained children have come to accept their below average performance in school (see Centra & Potter, 1980).

Plummer and Graziano (1982) contend that their data support the second explanation. Furthermore, in the particular school in which the investigation took place, retained children are not given "repetitive" work per se. Rather, they start the new year at the level they completed the previous year and work from there.

Taken together, these data suggest that the impact of grade retention is manifest in subtle ways. It is noteworthy that different effects of retention are obtained from younger and older children and are differentially elicited by different examiners. These data also suggest that the impact of mixed-age interaction is moderated by the larger social context in which the interaction occurs.

Considering the information outlined, it is not surprising to find that a child's success or failure in the school environment is not just a matter of a child's individual efforts or of effective or ineffective teaching, nor is it merely a matter of a favorable emotional climate at home. The child who does not compete successfully in school is likely to develop problems in living and in coping with his or her surroundings (Chase, 1972). Taken together, these studies suggest that intellectual and social development go hand-in-hand and that so-called tangential qualities like self-concept and self-evaluation may be very important for subsequent intellectual development.

CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Grade retention is a widespread policy in schools in the United States. The topic elicits diverse attitudes as well as diverse research findings. Investigations in this area of inquiry have focused on academic and social factors influenced by grade retention. Conclusive statements regarding these factors are difficult to make; evidence suggests that the impact of grade retention may be manifest in subtle but significant ways. Nonetheless, a convergent analysis allows for some important points to be made.

Academic Consequences

Children are usually retained in grade because they fall below certain standards of academic achievement or social maturity. The fact that an abundance of research indicates that retention does not necessarily lead to significant improvements in academic achievement makes it necessary for all those concerned to take a closer look at the policy of grade retention. Even further, it is important to note that grade retention may not guarantee that the student will reach minimum performance standards to advance to subsequent grades.

A subcomponent of academic achievement, threat of nonpromotion, does not appear to be a significant motivating factor for students. Additionally, many extraneous factors may influence the decision not to promote a child. The most notable of these factors have included socioeconomic status and classroom behavior. Furthermore, grade retention does not produce a homogeneous classroom for teachers. The results of these empirical investigations are therefore in direct contradiction to the reasons established for retaining a child. Research evidence has also revealed that there are no consistent, generally accepted criteria for the retention of a child in grade. One plausible explanation for the contradictory findings is that different schools in the same districts or in different cities or states use different guidelines to retain or not retain a child. Given that these variations exist, an initial problem is to systematically reevaluate basic grade retention policies. Specific guidelines are needed that can be accepted by different schools in different regions.

Social Consequences

The second reason a child can be retained in grade is that of social immaturity. The fact that grade retention practices permit the child to be

placed in classrooms with younger children suggests the possibility of creating a situation in which the child reaches a limited level of social maturity. For instance, a child who is retained in the second grade may eventually reach the maturity level of his or her nonretained second-grade counterparts; however, this same retained child is chronologically older and should have reached a higher level of development. So the question becomes, Where should such a child be placed in the subsequent school term? The answer to this question depends on four related factors: (a) the developmental level the child has reached during the retained year, (b) the developmental level in which his or her chronological age-mates operate, (c) the availability of faculty or staff to assist the child in making social adjustments, and (d) the support available to the child outside of the school environment (i.e., from family, friends, or other organizations such as clubs and churches). In order to answer this question, a substantive amount of information must be obtained. Caution is warranted in that the decisions made could well have long term effects on the child.

Research suggests that grade retention could possibly interrupt children's interactions with their peers. Although the mechanism responsible for these effects remains unclear, the literature from mixed-age interactions, equity theory, and status generalization provide some clues. Briefly, the literature on mixed-age groups suggests that children do react differently to children who are perceived as different from themselves. Equity theory provides imformation in regard to how discriminatory or justifiable interactions may occur. For example, from this perspective, it could be argued that rejection and peer discrimination against the retained child may be seen as the deserved outcome for the input of poor school

performance. Status generalization may then be the process that promotes understanding of how relevant and/or irrelevant factors might operate to influence peer interactions. It seems that status differences evoke differential evaluations about individuals and provide the basis for inferring differences in other (i.e., irrelevant) capacities or characteristics possessed by the individual.

These findings are further complicated by potential developmental trends affecting children's perceptions of retained and nonretained peers. It appears that younger children, due to their developmental level or their less sophisticated level of social cognition, are less discriminative (e.g., they reward both retained and nonretained children equitably for their performances) toward a retained child than are their older counterparts. Or it could be argued that size is a more valuable and salient factor to the younger child than to the older child (i.e., younger children hold the older and larger child in higher esteem than they do a same-size or younger child). If this difference between age groups is true, then it is possible that retaining a child in earlier grades could be less harmful to the child than retention at a later stage. These speculations warrant further research.

Self-Concept

Based on previous research, it can be assumed that retaining a child in grade could increase, decrease, or have no effect on his or her self-concept. However, current investigations suggest that these mixed results could be due to an intervening variable--namely, a child's self-expectations. The old adage "You are what you think you are" can be applied here. It is proposed that the child who is not successful in school may come to doubt his or her abilities, and once these doubts are confirmed by

retention in grade, further expectations for success are lowered. For instance, a child who does not expect to do well (i.e., has a low ideal self-concept) and who actually does not perform well (i.e., has a low real self-concept) will appear to have a high actual self-concept. Such a child's actual performance would be consistent with his or her low expectations. The individual ideal standards or self-expectations of children are important. In order for a child to excel, he or she must be motivated to do so and must believe that success is possible.

Implications for Educators

It is apparent that educators must rethink the policy of grade retention. In light of evidence against this policy, possible alternatives must be sought. Many alternatives have been proposed in the literature, yet well-meaning teachers continue to employ retention with the support of parents and school administrators. Perhaps teachers, parents, and school administrators are not convinced about problems related to nonpromotion. If this is the case, convincing evidence must be presented to them in formal (e.g., inservice training, parent conferences) and informal ways. It is further suggested that if retention is employed, rational decision making, parental attitudes, administrative and peer group attitudes, and the characteristics of the student and environment must be taken into account. There can be no simple solution to this very complex problem.

Grade retention as a solution to the "minimal competencies" problem may itself pose further problems. The primary task for researchers is to isolate those factors that would minimize the potential negative effects of grade retention and maximize the benefits. For instance, so far it has been established that grade retention can be beneficial for the child if (a) careful selections are made of children who will be retained; (b) reten-

tion is implemented when it will be most effective and least likely to have a negative impact on the child's social development; (c) systematic assessments are made of the child's academic and social progress; and (d) parents, teachers, and peers are supportive of the child (e.g., reward the child for academic progress and encourage cooperation and interactions with peers and involvement in extracurricular activities). These factors are important and must be considered if grade retention is to have a positive impact on the child's academic and social development.

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